

Memorandum: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) for School Year 2026-2027

To: Members of the Middletown Board of Education
From: Randall Mel, Jr; Director of Food, Nutrition and Wellness Services
Date: March 1st, 2026
Re: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) – School Year 2026–2027

Overview

Each year, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-215f, local boards of education participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are required to vote on participation in the Healthy Food Certification (HFC). The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has issued Operational Memorandum No. 03-26 (January 30, 2026), outlining the requirements and motion language for School Year 2026–2027 .

The HFC statute requires that boards of education certify whether all food items offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS). These standards also apply to foods offered in reimbursable snacks for the Afterschool Snack Program .

To remain eligible for HFC for the period of July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027, the Board must conduct the required vote(s) using the exact motion language provided by the CSDE and complete the application process by July 1, 2026 .

What is the Healthy Food Certification (HFC)?

The Healthy Food Certification is a voluntary statewide initiative that ensures all foods sold to students outside of reimbursable school meals meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. This includes foods sold:

- In school stores
- In vending machines
- In school cafeterias (outside reimbursable meals)
- Through culinary programs
- Through fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by school or non-school groups

Participation signals a district-wide commitment to offering healthier food choices to students throughout the school environment.

Importance to Middletown Public Schools

Participation in HFC reinforces Middletown Public Schools' commitment to student health, wellness, and academic success. Research consistently demonstrates the link between

proper nutrition, improved concentration, behavior, and overall student achievement. By ensuring that all foods sold during the school day meet state nutrition standards, the district:

- Promotes healthy eating habits
- Supports long-term student wellness
- Aligns with district wellness policies
- Creates consistency between meals and competitive food sales
- Demonstrates leadership in public health and child nutrition

HFC participation also provides additional state funding to the Food & Nutrition Services Department. This additional revenue helps offset rising food and labor costs, supports the procurement of high-quality and nutritious products, and strengthens the financial sustainability of our meal programs. These funds directly support the district's ability to maintain compliant, appealing, and affordable meal offerings for students.

Exemptions

If the Board votes to participate in HFC, it must also vote on whether to allow limited food exemptions for events held after the regular school day or on weekends, as defined by statute . The Board may also vote on optional beverage exemptions, which are governed by a separate statute (C.G.S. Section 10-221q) .

Exemptions, if approved, allow flexibility for certain school-related events while maintaining strong nutrition standards during the regular school day.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Middletown Board of Education:

1. Vote to participate in the Healthy Food Certification for School Year 2026–2027.
2. Vote on the required food exemption option.
3. Consider whether to allow beverage exemptions or to combine food and beverage exemptions into a single motion.

Participation ensures continued alignment with state standards, strengthens our wellness initiatives, and provides additional funding to support student nutrition programs.

Respectfully submitted,
Randall Mel, Jr.
Director of Food, Nutrition and Wellness Services
Middletown Public Schools

Attached is the CSDE OM03-26

Exact Motion Language for Board Action

Vote 1: Required Vote for Participation in Healthy Food Option of HFC

Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the **Middletown Board of Education** certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.

Vote 2: Required Vote for Food Exemptions (If Voting “Yes” to HFC)

The **Middletown Board of Education** will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food sales.

Vote 3: Optional Vote for Beverage Exemptions

The **Middletown Board of Education** will allow the sale to students of beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the beverages are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. The “school day” is the period from

midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the beverage sales.